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SUBJECT: US STRONGLY DEFENDS GEORGIAN RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE
IN UNOMIG MEETING

REF: STATE 99397

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: During Security Council consultations on July 25, Georgia's request to speak in the July 26 meeting on the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) was the subject of intense debate. Russia insisted that Georgia should not participate in the UNOMIG meeting unless Abkhaz de facto Foreign Minister Shamba was also given a Council meeting. The UK, France, Belgium and Slovakia supported the US position of Georgia's right to participate in the UNOMIG meeting, with the UK adding that the Shamba issue should be viewed separately. The final decision came in the form of a compromise, proposed by the Chinese presidency and agreed to by all Council members, calling for a private meeting in which Georgia could speak to be followed by closed consultations and agreement to seriously consider a Shamba appearance in an Arria-style meeting at a later date.

¶2. (SBU) At the Security Council private meeting on UNOMIG on July 26, Hedi Annabi, Assistant Secretary General at DPKO, briefed the Council on the recent report of the SYG on UNOMIG and also touched extensively on the SYG's report on the March attacks in the Kodori valley. Annabi called on the Council to support the recent recommendations for strengthening UNOMIG preventative capability in the Kodori Valley. Georgian PR Alasania used his comments to strongly condemn the March 11 attack on his country's sovereign territory in the Kodori Valley. He also expressed Georgian reluctance to allow Russian involvement in further mediation until the investigation into the March attacks yielded more conclusive results. Russia charge Konstantin Dolgov responded by calling the Kodori incident "an act of provocation planned by Georgia specialists." U.S. Ambassador Sanders strongly defended Georgia's presence in Kodori and noted that Georgia had fully cooperated with the investigation into the March 11 incident and had satisfied investigators that its helicopters were not involved. In closed consultations following the meeting, Russia stated its intention to call for an Arria-style meeting with Shamba. South Africa, Panama, and China expressed their support for such a meeting, saying it should happen as soon as possible. Nearly all countries present called for the resumption of dialogue and Quadripartite meetings, agreed that investigation of the March incident should continue, and supported the recent SYG recommendations for strengthening UNOMIG. End Summary.

July 25 Consultations On UNOMIG Meeting Format: Fierce Debate Over Shamba Meeting

¶3. (SBU) During Security Council consultations on July 25, the Chinese Presidency raised the issue of Georgia's request to speak and Germany's request to appear in the July 26

meeting on the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG). Ambassador Sanders spoke vigorously defending the right of the Georgian delegation to speak and stressing that the quarterly UNOMIG briefing should not be further delayed. (Note: The U.S. had informed the Russians and Chinese Presidency before consultations that we would push the issue to a procedural vote if necessary.)

¶4. (SBU) Speaking for Russia, charge Konstantin Dolgov claimed that Georgia should not participate in the UNOMIG meeting unless both parties to the conflict could express their viewpoints. He emphasized that Russia was requesting only an Arria-style meeting for Abkhaz de facto Foreign Minister Shamba because it understood that a normal Security Council meeting carried with it "political implications" and that Russia was conscious of its role as a mediator to the conflict. Dolgov charged, however, that Russia did not accept that the Friends of the SYG should decide when Shamba could participate in a UNSC meeting. Russia needed to be able to give Moscow clear assurances that a meeting with Shamba would take place. "It does not have to be tomorrow and we will give clear advance notice and will hope for adequate participation from the Security Council," Dolgov added.

¶5. (SBU) The UK responded that Georgia's right to participate in the July 26 UNOMIG meeting seemed obvious and should be viewed separately. The UK did not oppose in principle a meeting for Shamba in New York, which could be an Arria or even Geneva-style meeting, but it could not be "a gift." At a time when the Abkhaz were blocking resumption of dialogue and there was no progress on confidence building measures, circumstances did not permit such a meeting.

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¶6. (SBU) Speaking again, Dolgov asserted that there were many cases where a UN member state was shut out of Security Council meetings by one or two members. Georgia continued to seriously violate the cease-fire agreement, continued Dolgov, adding that he knew of "no impediments to the political process from the other side." We should not establish a principle that listening to one party to a conflict is a reward, he asserted.

¶7. (SBU) Supporting the UK's argument, France's political coordinator supported Georgia's right to speak. We would need to continue work in the Friends to make sure all conditions are met before there can be an Arria-style meeting for Shamba. Belgium stated that the issue of Abkhaz participation in a meeting should be kept separate and we should approve Georgia's request to participate because recent discussions on Security Council on working methods argued for this. Slovakia supported Georgia's right to participate in a meeting. Apparently speaking in defense of Russia's position, Indonesia stated that the discussion of substance in the meeting on Georgia would be more important than format and it was true that sometimes the Security Council declined some requests for participation, which was nothing new.

¶8. (SBU) China brought the disagreement to a close, proposing a compromise of a private meeting in which Georgia could speak and Germany would be present, followed by closed consultations of the Security Council. China, in its national capacity, backed up Russia's contention that a Council appearance should not be a reward for good behavior and urged members to agree in principle now that Shamba should be invited to New York. Ambassador Sanders replied that the Friends of Georgia group was involved in delicate discussions with the parties and that the US would be strongly influenced by its recommendation regarding Shamba. Italy and South Africa spoke out in favor of the private meeting/closed consultations format, which in the end was agreed to by Russia and all present.

¶9. (SBU) Delivering a briefing on the SYG's latest report on UNOMIG, U/SYG Annabi said the SYG's report reaffirmed recommendations allowing for greater international observation that could hopefully prevent a similar incident in the future. Annabi stated that UNOMIG has made temporary posts in the lower Kodori region and has activated the Adjara patrol base. However, the Abkhaz side refuses to discuss further implementations until Georgia withdraws. UNOMIG is still talking with the Abkhaz and hopes that with Council support, more progress will be made soon. Annabi ended by repeating UNOMIG's request for unmanned aerial vehicles, saying that they would have significantly contributed to the investigation into the March attack.

¶10. (SBU) Georgia PR Alasania began his remarks by affirming Georgia's commitment to direct dialogue between sides in spite of the refusal of the Abkhaz leader to meet without preconditions. He condemned the March 11 bombardment of Upper Abkhazia, reminding the Council of Georgia's full cooperation with the investigation by the Joint Fact Finding Group (JFFG). Alasania also expressed disappointment that the report was inconclusive, as crucial information was withheld from the investigation. He called for implementation of the recommendations of the JFFG for strengthening UNOMIG. Finally, Alasania declared that Georgia "assumes as impossible the participation of the Russian side in the negotiations conducted in the format of the Group of Friends and of the Secretary General or any other formats where it bears the capacity of special facilitator, before the comprehensive investigation is concluded."

¶11. (SBU) Dolgov, indicating that he had not intended to speak until closed consultations but was compelled to do so, argued that ongoing tension in Kodori is not from the March 11 incident, but started in July 2006 when Georgia decided to regain control of the territory. There were clear violations of the Moscow Ceasefire Agreement that had worsened the situation. Dolgov also alleged that the Georgian version of the bombardment was not in keeping with the facts. The Russian air force press reported that Russian air force was not and could not be responsible for the March incident because they did not have the technological capability to have caused the attacks. Russian shards are not sufficient

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proof of Russian involvement, as all former USSR territories are familiar with materials used by Russia.

¶12. (SBU) Dolgov blamed Georgia for the incident, saying that it was likely "an act of provocation planned by Georgian specialists." To support this claim, Dolgov pointed out that only administrative buildings were harmed in the attack. He said that Georgians warned civilians before the attack and helped them to hide in nearby forests. The Georgian Ministry of Defense also owns a helicopter of the same type that was used in the attack.

¶13. (SBU) Dolgov expressed concern over the Georgian statement that the Georgians reject Russian participation in the negotiations. Russia, Dolgov claimed, had participated actively in the investigation and its role in peacekeeping in the region has been commended many times by the UN.

¶14. (SBU) Ambassador Sanders, speaking for the United States, responded that the Georgian armed-police presence in Kodori led to control of criminal elements there and Georgia has the obligation and the right to police its territory. No intentional violations of the Moscow Agreement were involved. Georgia also accounted for the location of all of its helicopters during the March incident and turned over radar records willingly.

¶15. (SBU) In the closed session, Dolgov said that though Georgia has proclaimed a willingness to unblock talks, its actions indicate otherwise. He criticized the "many new violations" of the Moscow Agreement by Georgia, specifically citing the "Young Patriot Camp" near the ceasefire line. Dolgov called for a full implementation of Resolution 1752 and the measures discussed in Bonn to unblock the Quadripartite process. He also stated Russia's intention to arrange an Arria-style meeting with Shamba in due course.

¶16. (SBU) The United States, Slovakia, Italy, Belgium, France, and the United Kingdom each called for the implementation of Resolution 1752 and the agreements made at Bonn, specifically the resumption of dialogue and Quadripartite meetings. They also agreed that investigation of the March incident should continue, which would allow the Council to gain a greater understanding of what occurred and thereby prevent similar incidents. They all supported the recent recommendations in the SYG report for strengthening UNOMIG.

¶17. (SBU) South Africa, Panama and China expressed support for Russia's decision to arrange an Arria-style meeting with the Abkhaz and hoped that it takes place soon. Panama emphasized the importance of hearing all parties involved in the matter, calling on the president to make sure that each side in the conflict would be heard. After praising UNOMIG and CIS cooperation and the involvement of the Friends, China stated they would like the Arria-style meeting proposed by Russia to be held as soon as possible.

¶18. (SBU) Comment: While our arguments and careful coordination behind the scenes carried the day this time around in consultations on the format of the UNOMIG meeting, we narrowly avoided an almost unprecedented procedural vote on this issue and likely succeeded only because we threatened such a vote. We also note that the French, who, like the UK, were represented at the Political Coordinator-level, asserted to us privately that they were "disgusted with our visa policy." We replied that the U.S. is happy with any result that gets Georgia in the room and defers consideration of the Shamba issue in accord with the Friends' majority view. However, it is clear that the gap between the positions of Western Friends' capitals and their New York missions is wide and perhaps even growing wider. In the July 26 consultations, China, South Africa and Panama spoke in favor of a meeting for Shamba soon. The controversy surrounding this issue is almost certain to become more intense at the time of the mandate renewal in October if there is not sufficient progress in the political process to warrant a first-time meeting for de facto Abkz Foreign Minister Shamba in New York. This will likely lead to allegations by Russia and others that the US is not living up to its host-country responsibilities and that we are using visa policy to stymie free debate. If Abkhaz cooperation in the political process does not improve and we do not find a way to shore up support and understanding for our position more broadly in the

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Council--and not just among our increasingly skittish EU friends--then we will likely find ourselves in an increasingly defensive posture. End Comment.

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